

*Halvorson Encourages Eligible Veterans to Apply*

Congresswoman Debbie Halvorson (IL-11) is encouraging all eligible veterans in the 11th District to apply for education benefits under the new Webb-Mitchell GI Bill for Post-9/11 vets. Recently passed by Congress with an overwhelming majority, the bill offers to pay tuition, fees and housing expenses to members of the military who've served on active duty since September 11, 2001. Available to veterans for up to 15 years after leaving active duty, the benefit also includes activated reservists and members of the National Guard.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for our veterans who wish to pursue higher education," said Halvorson. "Whether it's to advance careers or expand their knowledge base, this benefit gives post-9/11 veterans the financial means to college. It's the least we can do for those who've served our country so well."

On May 1, the Department of Veterans Affairs began accepting applications for the benefit which includes tuition, fees, books and other educational assistance for veterans. The bill becomes effective for education and/or training on or after August 1, 2009. Eligibility includes veterans with an honorable discharge with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after September 11, 2001 or a discharge for a service-connected disability after 30 days.

Veterans can determine their eligibility and apply online at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>

Under the legislation:

- Service members, including those returning from Iraq or Afghanistan, can receive up to 36 months of education benefits, including \$5,126.50 per term for tuition in Illinois
- Veterans can also receive an annual books & supplies stipend of \$1,000 paid proportionately based on enrollment.
- Veterans would have the ability to use their benefits for program fees, tuition, books and housing.
- Veterans would be able to use the Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program, in which the federal government will match, dollar for dollar, any voluntary additional contributions to veterans from institutions whose tuition is more expensive than the maximum educational assistance provided under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.
- Benefits are also applicable for apprenticeships, vocational schools, and other non-traditional

post-secondary educational settings.

- Veterans would have up to 15 years after they leave active duty to use their education benefits